

Chairperson Clark and members of the committee  
my name is Susan Wheat. I reside at 908 Wilder  
Avenue in Helena, and I have been a Montana resident  
for 12 1/2 years.

I am here this morning with my two youngest sons,  
Jordan and Kade, who were both diagnosed with  
autism in 2003. I can tell you that as a mother, it  
was the most heartbreakin and life-changing moment  
in my life. Every day since, I have worried about how  
my little boys would function in, and be accepted by  
society. Even more, I have worried about how to give  
them their best possible chance at a productive and  
happy life.

Including Family Outreach in our journey was the most  
important step I have taken for my sons since their  
diagnosis. They have provided us with training, education,  
and emotional support. Jordan and Kade were placed on  
Part C services and were also placed on the waiting list  
for the Intensive Program. When they turned 3, they  
lost their Part C services and were placed on General  
Fund. After being on the waiting list for 2 years,  
they received a place in the Intensive Program. They now  
receive much needed habilitation training, therapy  
equipment, family training, and respite care. ~~and all the other things~~ Without these services, my  
sons would ~~be unable to make the steady progress that~~

not be at the level of function that they have today.

Raising children with special needs goes far beyond what is needed for the average child. Research has proven that early intervention is crucial in helping children with autism make gains in function. Without it, they will only lag further behind. The Child and Family Developmental Disabilities Program meets this need for our children and families dealing with the challenges of autism.

I respectfully ask that you strongly consider additional funds for House Bill 2 so that this program can continue successfully under the new Medicaid rate redesign project, and that this appropriation be used solely for Child and Family Services.

Finally, we appreciate so very much <sup>the services</sup> that our family receives, and appreciate the opportunity to speak to you today.